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ABSTRACT

This digest discusses comprehensive training planning for students with disabilities and ways educators can facilitate the involvement of students with disabilities in helping to formulate the Individualized Transition Plan component of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Strategies for encouraging student participation include: (1) begin instruction as early as possible in self-determination and other related skills; (2) be prepared to support students with sensitive issues and work through all issues and questions about a disability with students; (3) make sure you feel comfortable talking about a topic or allowing the student to lead the IEP process; (4) schedule time for students to develop skills related to IEP participation on a regular basis; (5) teach IEP participation skills as a semester course; (6) use motivational techniques to interest students, such as inviting an individual with a disability to talk to students; and (7) communicate with families and explain the transition process. (Contains a list of seven publications on transition, along with four related Web sites.) (CR)

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By

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Planning Student-Directed Transitions to Adult Life

Cynthia Warger and Jane Burnette

Today, transition is seen as more than providing service routes in the individual's movement from high school to employment–it is seen as a comprehensive approach to educational program development consisting of an alignment of student goals with educational experiences and services.

Since the early 1980s, federal law has underscored the need for comprehensive transition planning and broadened its focus. The 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that:

- Is designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.
- Is based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests.
- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

IDEA also states that transition planning must be part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and begin at age 14. By age 16, the IEP should contain a statement of needed transition services for the child, including, when appropriate, a statement of interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages. Further, students must be invited to attend their IEP meetings if the purpose of the meeting will be to consider the student's transition service needs.

How can educators facilitate these new requirements–especially those that promote and strengthen the involvement of students with disabilities in decisions regarding their own futures? This digest describes how research is helping to inform practice around that programmatic issue.

Facilitating Student-Centered Transition Planning

IDEA '97 and its 1999 Regulations reflect a body of research–much of it supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)–that describes aspects of quality transition programs for students with disabilities. One of those key aspects is facilitating student-centered transition planning.

With OSEP support, Kohler (1998) organized the research literature, model projects, and exemplary programs on transition into a taxonomy of relevant practices. She found that student-focused planning was a necessary component in facilitating transition. Because the Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the planning vehicle for implementing the transition requirements specified in the IDEA, student participation in this process is essential. Specifically, students should be included in decisions related to post-school goals to ensure they are valued and attainable. As such, self-determination skills are considered to be fundamental to student participation in their own IEPs.

Practitioners should begin early to assist and guide students in developing appropriate education programs based on individual transition goals. With OSEP support, Martin et al. (in press) has studied skills students need to participate actively in their IEPs. These include:

- **How to choose goals**. Provide experiences so students identify their interests, skills, and limits across transition areas.
- **How to participate in and lead their IEP meetings.** Teach students self-determination, self-advocacy, and meeting skills.
- **How to accomplish goals.** Teach students how to develop a plan to attain their goals, take action on the plan, evaluate and adjust their plan of action.

Curricula are available to assist practitioners in helping students direct their IEPs (e.g., Martin et al., 1996).

Helping Students Participate in their IEPs

With sufficient preparation and support, students can participate in their IEP process in various ways. The extent of participation will depend on their abilities and interests–for

example, some students direct their own meeting, while others take a specific part to direct. Teachers experienced in involving their students in the IEP process have made the following suggestions (ERIC/OSEP Special Project, 2000):

- **Begin instruction as early as possible.** Some areas of study, such as self-determination skills, can begin in the elementary school.
- **Be prepared to support students with sensitive issues.** Some students may never have seen their IEP and some may not even know what it means. Even if a student knows about IEPs, reading about one's disability can be unsettling. Teachers need to work through all issues and questions with students. It may help to talk individually with students before sharing the IEP.
- **Ensure that students understand what their disability means.** It is important that students know about their disability and can talk about it to others. Encourage students to become comfortable stating what they need and what they do not need.
- **Make sure you feel comfortable with the process.** Students will know if adults are uncomfortable talking about a topic or allowing the student to lead the IEP.
- **Schedule time for students to develop skills related to IEP participation on a regular basis**. It is very easy to let other subjects–particularly academics–take priority. Teachers must believe that self-determination, planning, and self-advocacy skills are priorities.
- **Teach IEP participation skills as a semester course.** Students need sufficient time to master the skills. Although students can be taught skills once a week or in a day-long course, if you really want students to take an active role, you must allow sufficient time.
- **Use motivational techniques to interest students**. Before you begin training, invite an individual with a disability to talk to students. It helps to have role-alike models as speakers (e.g., an individual who is a college graduate, an individual who has gone to a vocational education center, an individual who works in supported employment, a person who owns a business).
- **Communicate with families.** Let parents know your intentions. It helps to invite families to a meeting where you can explain the approach and answer their questions.

These teachers believe that with sufficient preparation and support, students at all levels can actively participate in the IEP process. Teachers also have found that without preparation, students may not understand the language or the IEP process, and may feel as if other IEP team members have not listened to them. Teachers who have included students successfully note that they feel good about their participation, and they have a sense of accomplishment and empowerment as a result of their participation in the process.

Resources

ERIC/OSEP Special Project (Spring 2000). ***New ideas for planning transitions to the adult world***. *Research Connections, No. 6*. Reston, VA: author.

Field, S., Martin, J., Miller, R., Ward, M., & Wehmeyer, M. (1998). ***A practical guide for teaching self-determination.*** Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children.

Kohler, P. (1998). Implementing a transition perspective of education. In F. Rusch & J. Chadsey (Eds.), ***Beyond high school: Transition from school to work*** (pp. 179-205). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Kohler, P., & Martin, J. (1998). ***Transition from school to life: A workshop series for educators and transition service providers***. And, ***Transition from school to life: A complete course for special educators***. Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children.

Martin, J., Huber, L.H., & DePry, R.L. (in press). Participatory decision-making: Innovative practices that increase self-determination. In R. Flexer, T. Simmons, P. Luft, & R. Baer (Eds.), ***Planning transition across the lifespan***. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Martin, J., Marshall, L.H., Maxson, L. Jerman, P., Miller, T. McGill, T. & Hughes, W. (1996). ***Choicemaker curriculum***. Longmont, CO. Sopris West Publishers.

West, L., Corbey, S., Boyer-Stephens, A., Jones, B., Miller, R., & Sarkees-Wircenski, M. (1999). ***Integrating transition planning into the IEP process*** (second edition). Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children.

Web Sites Related to Transition

National Transition Alliance for Youth with Disabilities
{ HYPERLINK http://www.dssc.org/nta }

National Transition Network
{ HYPERLINK http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/ntn }

Transition Research Institute
{ HYPERLINK http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/SPED/tri/institute.html }

Center for Self-Determination
{ HYPERLINK http://www.self-determination.org }

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